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ALSACE UNDER GERMAN RULE

BY
PAUL ALBERT HELMER

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ALSACE UNDER GERMAN RULE

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BY

PAUL ALBERT HELMER

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T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.

ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Maître Paul Albert Helmer was born in Alsace in 1874. He studied at the High School of Schlestadt, and afterwards at the University of Strasburg, and graduated Doctor of Laws in 1895, and Doctor of Political Science in 1896.

In 1900-1901 he was Secretary to the Franco-Bulgarian Arbitration Commission relating to the Isker railway.

He was subsequently a magistrate at Colmar, and afterwards, from 1902, an advocate in that town. He won distinction more especially as an advocate in political lawsuits in the numerous and very often notorious lawsuits which show what life was for the natives of Alsace-Lorraine under the harassing, malignant and pitiless rule of the Germans. His essential qualities as a political advocate are the reliability of his documentation and the close reasoning of his arguments.

He was counsel for the *Souvenir Alsacien-Lorrain*, a society founded with the object of honouring the tombs and perpetuating the memory of the French soldiers who fell in 1870 in Alsace-Lorraine. The Society was dissolved, and an action was brought against its members. Maître Helmer defended them with admirable vigour.

He was counsel in the so-called *Procès des Faméliques* for the *Nouvelliste d'Alsace-Lorraine* (the Abbé Wetterlé's newspaper), which had spoken of the immigrant officials as descendants of "the ravenous band which fell upon Alsace-Lorraine after 1870"! It was on account of the use of this expression, "les faméliques," that the Public Prosecutor instituted the proceedings.

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He appeared against the Under-Secretary of State (Mandel), the bitter enemy of the Alsatians, in another Press action, when, to the great scandal of all the immigrants, he denounced Prince Joachim of Prussia as the author of the Pan-German threats against Alsace-Lorraine. (Maître Helmer, be it said, is the first authority in Alsace and in France on the history of Pan-Germanism, to the progress, influence and menace of which he has constantly called attention.)

He was counsel for the Abbé Wetterlé against the German General Keim, President of the Army League and responsible for the German Army Act of 1913. The General had offended gravely against the natives of Alsace-Lorraine ; Maître Helmer succeeded in procuring his conviction.

He was counsel for Hansi, the caricaturist, in all his lawsuits. He was, in fact, his lawyer. It was he who defended him in the *Historie d'Alsace* case, in the *Mon Village* case, and others.

The *Mon Village* case was first heard at Colmar. Magnificent speeches were made by Maître Preiss and Maître Helmer. But Hansi was condemned beforehand. The tribunal sent him for trial before the Supreme Court of Leipzig on a charge of high treason, and he was immediately arrested. It was a tragic day in the political history of these last years in Alsace-Lorraine. A new era of severities and persecutions began under the auspices of the new Statthalter. The authorities were determined to suppress the French sympathies of the Alsatians by every possible means.

The trial for high treason took place at the Court of Leipzig a few weeks later—just a year ago. Maître Helmer again defended Hansi, regardless of the

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perils to which he thus exposed himself. Hansi was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment.

At the moment when the war broke out, the authorities were collecting evidence and initiating proceedings against Maître Helmer, with a view to prosecuting him in his turn for high treason. The Abbé Wetterlé was also to be prosecuted.

Fortunately Maître Helmer succeeded in getting away into France two days before the mobilisation. He was able to render signal service in Alsace when it was re-occupied by the French troops by means of the political information he gave to the Command.

The German authorities seized his possessions at Colmar and decreed that whoever gave him refuge would incur capital punishment.

Maître Helmer has worked indefatigably ever since in the cause of French Alsace, contributing articles to the *Temps*, *La France de demain*, *Le Correspondent*, *La Revue politique et parlementaire*, *Les Annales*, and many other papers and reviews, and giving lectures innumerable in Paris, Bordeaux ("Culture et Kultur"), and throughout France.

When the war is over, Maître Helmer will undoubtedly play a prominent part, together with Wetterlé, Preiss, Langel, and others, in the public life of an Alsace restored to France.

We may add that in 1911, Maître Helmer was responsible for the *Programme* of the National Union of Alsace-Lorraine, setting forth the claims of the annexed population, both national and political.

He has published *Ephémérides Alsaciennes* (a faithful record of the events of the German occupation during the war of 1870, and of the atrocities committed by the Germans at this period), and founded the review, *Nouvelles de France*.

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The question of Alsace-Lorraine has been at the root of the entire foreign policy of France for the last forty-four years. It was this question which created and kept alive the antagonism between the Republic and the German Empire. But for it, the two great neighbours might perhaps have come to terms. The defeat of the Imperial armies in 1870 would have been but a wound to self-esteem which the change of political *régime* would have quickly healed. The loss of five thousand million francs, and even of more than this, would soon have been compensated by renewed material progress.

But when Bismarck forced the nation to give up a population eager to remain French, he laid upon her the obligation of a war to the knife, such as the desire for revenge must entail. When he compelled vanquished France to cede a million and a half of her children as the price of peace, he created a debt of honour for the mother-country which a chivalrous people would have held it ignominious to forget.

It is true that France did not provoke the present war. But she foresaw and expected it. The enemy who had scorned the rights of nationalities in 1871, who had done violence to the formally and solemnly expressed will of the natives of Alsace and Lorraine, was incapable of stopping short in his career of crime. By his mad pride and arrogance, he was

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destined himself to bring about the inevitable day of imminent justice.

And Alsace, too, has been waiting patiently for this day for forty-four years. It was her consolation in present suffering to preserve piously as a sacred trust the memory of her French past, recollections of the period when, in communion with France, she had successively tasted the sweetness of life, liberty, glory, and fruitful civic prosperity.

It seems there were persons before the war who believed that Alsace was Germanised and contented with her lot. This is surprising to us. It was holding our sense of fidelity and our code of honour very cheap. We have only to recall the past of Alsace to make it evident that our little nation could not in little more than a generation renounce and forget the sentiments of affection and gratitude which the slow action of several centuries had inculcated in her race.

THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE ANCIENT REGIME

Alsace formed a part of those central provinces which, after the division of the Empire of Charlemagne, were to have constituted an independent country, Lotharingia. In reality, throughout the course of history they were the object of continual struggles between the two nations they were intended to separate. Before belonging to France in modern times, Alsace had long been part of the ancient Empire of Germany. It is on this fact that the Germans base their claim to the province as German territory which ought to come back to them.

This affirmation is too simple to apply to the complex situation of a frontier country. As a fact, Alsace, even in the Middle Ages, though it spoke a

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German dialect, was in the orbit of French culture. The Gothic artists who built Strasburg Cathedral came from the Ile de France or had learnt their art there. The Alsatian authors who figure in German literature, such as Gottfried, of Strasburg, and Fischart, imitated French authors, or initiated their German readers into the courtly life of France. Alsatian scholars studied in Paris, and at all periods many persons conversant with the French tongue were to be found in the cultivated classes.

Alsace, thus attracted by the French genius, was bound to Germany only by the political constitution of the ancient Empire. Now this constitution ensured her all but complete independence in her different localities, without imposing any appreciable burdens upon her. But the Empire, though, on the one hand, it exacted little, on the other was not very lavish in its proffered benefits. It did not even guarantee public safety, and, in those days of incessant warfare, Alsace greatly needed protection. Her rich plains attracted the troops of every chieftain. To say nothing of her innumerable internecine quarrels, Alsace, from the Hundred Years' War onward, had seen in her country the Armagnacs, the English, and the Burgundians; after the Reformation she saw there the Austrians, the Hungarians, the Spaniards and the Swedes, who successively ravaged and ruined the country.

In the seventeenth century, the Thirty Years' War proved more conclusively than anything the impotence of the German Empire, and caused Alsace to seek aid and protection from a more powerful State. Such was the object of the conventions entered into by several Alsatian towns with Richelieu, the culmination of which was the

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reunion of Alsace with France by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Louis XIII, and afterwards Louis XIV, took Alsace under their protection at her own request.

France succeeded in making herself beloved in the province. Anxious to preserve the sympathies she had inspired, she respected the immunities of the communes, and the traditions and customs of the inhabitants. Her policy was inspired by a generosity and breadth of view which persuaded them that their reunion with France had wrought no change in their lives.

French rule manifested itself only in beneficent effects. Never had Alsace been so tranquil, so securely defended against foreign armies. Trade and industry developed, thanks to an assured peace, and the skilful and benignant measures of the governors of the province, for France made it a point of honour to send her best administrators to the frontier territory. She also instituted the Sovereign Council of Alsace in the province, a single legal court for the whole territory, which dispensed justice both swiftly and impartially.

For a century and a half, France had succeeded in making the Alsatians appreciate the benefits of a firmly-organised State, inspired by broad and benevolent views. Their attachment to France was solidly established when the Great Revolution broke out.

THE REVOLUTION AND THE EMPIRE

The *ancien régime*, as I have said, had scrupulously respected the institutions created in Alsace by the feudal system. The country had continued to be divided into an infinite number of little

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republics, principalities and domains, the laws and territories of which were interwoven in the most complex fashion. But all these constitutions had outlived themselves. A local life no longer satisfied the Alsatians ; in 1789 they sacrificed it gladly to take their share in the life of the nation. The complete fusion of the Alsatian people with the French people was the first effect of the Revolution. The province had disappeared ; only Frenchmen remained.

And the Alsatians at once found their place in French political life. The parliamentary assemblies gave individual talent opportunities for attracting public attention. When the Republic adopted the directorial constitution, an Alsatian (Rewbel), a barrister of Colmar, became a member of the Directorate. The part he played was a prominent one ; as Minister for Foreign Affairs, he directed the external policy of France at the moment when, by the Treaty of Basle, Prussia recognised the cession of the left bank of the Rhine. Thus an Alsatian secured for France what she had desired for centuries—her natural frontiers.

The wars of the Revolution gave the people of Alsace opportunities of proving their French patriotism even greater than those offered by its political life. Many Alsatians won distinction in the Republican armies, from Kellermann, the victor of Valmy, to Kleber, the rival of Napoleon in Egypt. It was at this period that the military qualities of the Alsatian race manifested themselves most gloriously. The careers inaugurated by the Revolution were crowned by the Empire. Alsace contributed more men and generals to the Napoleonic epic than any other French province. Lefèvre, Rapp, Sirhanun, Berckheim, Hengel, and many others,

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down to the obscure defenders of Huningue, proved by their blood and their glorious exploits the depth of their attachment to their French fatherland.

A monument to this valiant Alsatian patriotism, this love for the nation, still survives. You all know it, but perhaps you do not know its Alsatian origin. When the first Revolutionary war broke out, the Mayor of Strasburg asked Rouget de Lisle to compose a song for the troops who were marching to meet the enemy. This officer, in a moment of genius, contrived to express in his "War Song of the Army of the Rhine" all that was firing the martial population of Strasburg, and urging it on to conflict. The Alsatian hymn, adopted by all France, has become inseparable from the tricolour. For the last one hundred and twenty years, on innumerable battle-fields, every attack by French soldiers has been made to the strains of the "War Song of the Army of the Rhine," the *Marseillaise*.

THE PROTEST

Thus, when in 1870 Germany coveted Alsace, the latter had long proved herself as thoroughly French as any other province of France. She did her duty during the mournful days of the Terrible Year, as in past days of Glory.

But in face of the German demands, our deputies thought it their duty to make a solemn affirmation of their sentiments directly the National Assembly convoked to conclude peace met at Bordeaux. On February 17th, 1871, they laid on the table a declaration in the following terms :

"Alsace and Lorraine are opposed to alienation. These two provinces, associated with

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France for more than two centuries in good and in evil fortune, and constantly exposed to hostile attack, have consistently sacrificed themselves in the cause of national greatness ; they have sealed with their blood the indissoluble compact that binds them to French unity. Under the present menace of foreign pretensions, they affirm their unshakable fidelity in the face of all obstacles and dangers, even under the yoke of the invader. With one accord citizens who have remained in their homes and soldiers who have hastened to join the colours proclaim by their votes or by their action in the field to Germany and to the world the unalterable determination of Alsace to remain French."

In spite of the formally declared wishes of the Alsatians and Lorrains, the National Assembly ratified the treaty of peace of March 1st, 1871. Then the Alsatians, before leaving the Chamber, read out the famous Protest of Bordeaux :

" We, who in defiance of all justice have been given over by an odious abuse of power to foreign domination, have a last duty to perform. We declare a compact which disposes of us without our consent nul and void. It will ever remain open to each and all of us to claim our rights in such manner and in such measure as conscience shall dictate. . . . Our brothers of Alsace and Lorraine, now cut off from the common family, will preserve their filial affection for the France now absent from their homes until the day when she returns to take her place there again."

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THE ANNEXATION

On March 2nd, 1871, populations which had been French for centuries, and whose French patriotism had grown up in the course of a history the main current of which I have indicated to you in a few words, were suddenly called upon to become German. Germany demanded this change with such urgency that she immediately exacted military service in the Prussian Army from men whose fathers and brothers had scarcely laid down their French arms. She hoped to obtain in a day what France had taken centuries to produce by a skilful and generous policy.

The Germans had not even a conception of the difficulties inherent in the task they had undertaken. They had made up their minds to ignore the sentiments of Alsace in spite of the violence with which they had been manifested during the war and at Bordeaux. They persisted in considering the attachment to the French motherland as a mere veneer easy to remove, a factor with which it was unnecessary to reckon.

Their main argument was based on language. It is true that the lower classes in Alsace speak a dialect of Germanic origin. But this dialect differs so much from written German that when the Alsatian speaks the latter, he is distinctly sensible of speaking a foreign tongue. In any case, the use of the dialect has not created any elective affinity with the German nation. Accordingly the lower orders were not only wounded in their feelings, but conscious of material injury when Germany forbade the teaching of French in the primary schools.

Germany looked for the ripening of fruit she did not know how to cultivate. On two occasions certain

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Germans essayed a policy of conciliation, and on each occasion the outcome was a period of violent conflict and of rigorous repression.

Those who sincerely desired the pacification of the province—Manteuffel from 1879 to 1885, Koeller after 1901—ran counter to the general feeling of their compatriots. The majority of Germans believe only in the exercise of force, and will accept nothing short of servile submission. Incapable of adapting themselves to the mentality of others, Germans can neither respect honourable sentiments, nor gain the sympathy or even the esteem of their adversaries. It is owing to this psychological disability that all their attempts at Germanisation have failed, and that they have succeeded not only in keeping alive the attachment of Alsace to France but in making the hostility of Alsace to Germany more violent than ever after forty-four years of German rule.

Before giving a sketch of the political struggles that have taken place in Alsace-Lorraine and the ideas which have successively governed the various persons directing German policy in our country, I shall discharge a debt of gratitude by telling you that when the Germans proscribed the use of the French language among us, or prevented Alsatians from holding public office, we had one argument to which our adversaries were never able to find an answer. We used to say to the Germans that a great nation, conscious of its national greatness and power, could afford to be generous, and to leave to those it had brought into its fold their language, their customs and their legitimate influence; we quoted in illustration the manner in which Great Britain had treated Canada and the South African

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Republics. But the Germans were incapable of understanding generosity.

THE MANTEUFFEL REGIME

I will not dwell upon the early years during which German rule was established with all the harshness of Bismarckian policy. The whole country was thrown into confusion. Those who would not endure German domination emigrated. Their places were taken by a colony of Germans whom we call immigrants, and look upon as foreigners to this day.

When, after the first settlement of the country, the constitution of 1879 enabled the Government of Alsace-Lorraine to pursue a clearly defined policy, the first Statthalter, Baron von Manteuffel, made it his object to win over the Alsatians to Germany by gentle methods. An old soldier, formerly Governor of the French departments until the payment of the war indemnity, he had a chivalrous disposition ; he dared to admit that Alsace had once been French. Given this fact, he was willing to believe that it was not possible to change one's nationality in a day by a stroke of the pen on a treaty of peace. " I do not yet ask for your sympathy " he said one day, in one of those programme-speeches he was fond of making, " but I advise you to look upon the union of Alsace-Lorraine to the German Empire as definitive."

Thus not only did he not exact an affection which cannot be forced, but even as a question of law, he did not demand a formal recognition of the Treaty of Frankfort. He was content with advice couched in terms as far from arbitrary as possible. He respected the feelings and the dignity of those he governed.

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In spite of the few demands he made upon the vanquished, he sought every occasion of coming into contact with them and doing them service. He was lavish with advice to those who came to ask for it, he listened to the complaints of all malcontents, and placed himself at the disposal of the population. Though he had declared that he did not ask for sympathy, he evidently sought to win it by his affability.

Baron von Manteuffel was a truly popular person, respected and liked even, and indeed more especially, by the adversaries of the nation he represented.

Yet his work failed.

The first Statthalter's successes were purely personal. His loyal and generous attitude was incomprehensible to his compatriots. Baron von Manteuffel's manner of approaching the Alsace-Lorraine problem, and the principles which inspired him in his efforts to win popularity, were contrary to the spirit of the German nation. Germany, which had tardily achieved unhoped-for power, knew nothing of chivalrous traditions, nor of respect for the personality, the rights and the interests of others. The tact and delicacy of Manteuffel, the nobility of heart which made him defer to the sentiments of the vanquished, were foreign to the great majority of his people.

The Statthalter of Alsace-Lorraine was accordingly repudiated by his German compatriots. He was accused of negotiating with the enemy, and of favouring native notabilities to the prejudice of the German immigrant officials in Alsace-Lorraine. On the one hand the trans-Rhenish press and the Government of Berlin demanded violent measures flagrantly opposed to his moderate and tolerant ideas, while

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on the other his own officials rebelled and were in open conflict with him.

Before even enquiring what effects the policy of conciliation and pacification inaugurated by the first Statthalter might have had upon the national sentiment of the Alsatians and Lorrains, it must be insisted that Baron von Manteuffel stood alone, his policy was reprobated by his own compatriots, and his popularity in Alsace was of no advantage to the German Government.

In any case, Baron von Manteuffel's policy, if not premature, could not have had any general and definitive effect until it had been steadily pursued for a considerable length of time.

The horrors of the war of 1870, the bombardment of Strasburg and the atrocities of Val-de-Villé were still fresh in the memory of the Alsatians. They had remained French in feeling. Before aspiring to be loved, the conquerors should have won forgiveness, and before even thinking of a reconciliation, they should have allowed time to soften facts by the insensible approach of forgetfulness. The Germans could not understand what the situation required of them. It was the business of the German nation to make itself esteemed and respected, and of the Empire to make itself acceptable by the material advantages it was in its power to bestow. But neither the people beyond the Rhine nor the Imperial Government faced the problem in the spirit of Manteuffel, whose sudden death cut short his work.

It was not likely that a smile from the Emperor's lieutenant would suffice to change the national sentiment of the Alsatians. In private, as in public life, they preserved an attitude consistent with their past.

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When the Bishop of Metz, Monseigneur Dupont des Loges, was awarded the Prussian Order of the Crown, he expressed his regret to the Statthalter, and published his letter. The Reichstag elections in Alsace were persistently hostile to Germany, and provoked measures of repression, ordered by the Berlin Government.

Not long after the death of the first Statthalter, in 1887, it was thought that war would shortly break out. The Boulangist movement, and the Schnaebeli and der Donon incidents caused Alsace to presage an approaching war of liberation. In the face of such an eventuality the once popular figure of Manteuffel was eclipsed, and only the arrogant attitude of his nation remained in sight. In January, 1887, the elections in Alsace-Lorraine were more violently antagonistic than any which had taken place since the annexation.

Germanisation by gentle methods, by the prestige and personal ascendancy of a man of high culture and great nobility of soul had not only proved a failure, but was for ever discredited in German public opinion. Thenceforth the immigrant officials were masters of the situation. It was they who were to choose in future methods of Germanising Alsace-Lorraine, in conformity with their ideas and their interests.

REPRESSION IN 1887

The first of these was violent repression.

The Germans could not understand the hostility of the Alsatians to them. Baron von Manteuffel had allowed that the Alsatians had been French and that it had been impossible for their feelings to change suddenly.

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The proposition was too simple for the minds of his compatriots. Their psychology did not accept fidelity to the past, either in themselves or others. Their military successes had been so unexpected and un hoped for, the realisation of their national unity had come about so suddenly, that they could not but produce infatuation among a parvenu people. They felt a naïve admiration for themselves, and believed they had accomplished things of which no other people in the history of the world could boast.

This sentiment had rapidly stifled the individualism of the confederated States in Germany, the past seemed small, mediocre and despicable. "The good old times" became a catchword in the satirical papers, which ridiculed the old German troops now replaced by the valiant and disciplined armies of Prussia. Very soon, in view of their economic development and the pretensions of their "world-politics," their ancient and glorious title: "a nation of poets and thinkers" sounded almost like an insult to German ears.

A nation which had thus turned its back upon its past could not understand that the Alsatian people would be faithful to its memories. To their arrogant self-sufficiency it was unthinkable that the Alsatians should not at the bottom of their hearts share their admiration for the great deeds of William I and his paladins. Alsace, according to them, might think herself highly privileged to be part of the mighty German Empire, and to see her sons received into the glorious ranks of the Prussian army. This sentiment seemed to them so natural that they cast about for some purely external reason to explain the persistent opposition of the annexed

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province. This they formulated in a very unexpected fashion :

If the Alsatians failed to acclaim the German Empire, as they should have been inclined to do, according to the Germans, it was because they were *terrorised*. This terror was not the effect of the *régime* to which they were subjected, the German dictatorship, the exceptional laws, the systematic espionage, and the denunciations of immigrant officials. According to the Germans, it was France who terrorised German Alsace ; it was through fear of French public opinion, of the judgment of friends and relatives who had remained French, that the Alsatians refused to be absorbed in the German Empire !

The Alsatians are recalcitrant because they are terrorised by France ! This was the axiom obediently adopted by the German press in the days of the Statthalter von Manteuffel. The idea seems an extraordinary one, but paradox has no terrors for the trans-Rhenish journalist, whose lack of critical sense and whose rigid discipline it is impossible to exaggerate.

It was this idea, no doubt, which inspired the reaction against the conciliatory *régime* inaugurated by the first Statthalter. Since Alsace was terrorised by France, it was necessary that Germany should terrorise her still more. If the Alsatians feared the disapproval of their former compatriots, they must learn that their new masters were still more to be feared, because they had more violent measures at their disposal. This programme was duly carried out in 1887, the year of the Schnaebelé affair and of the Donon incident.

Within the space of a few months Alsace was

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subjected to every kind of German brutality. Deputies were expelled and Alsatian societies were dissolved. Political prosecutions took place on every side, for offences such as seditious cries or emblems, membership of the League of Patriots, high treason, etc. To safeguard the Alsatians against intimidation by their French relatives, intercourse with persons beyond the frontier was made impossible by a regulation prescribing the use of passports.

Bismarck even hoped, according to one of his successors, that there would be an insurrection, and that the *régime* of repression would culminate in bloodshed. This would have been the triumph of the principle of force.

He was disappointed ; we possessed our souls in patience. Alsace gave up overt protestation ; but a new Alsatian generation which adopted other methods of resistance grew up under the pressure of the brutal measures of 1887. Meanwhile, Germany succeeded in introducing the *régime* most congenial to her national spirit, no longer mitigated by a personality such as that of Manteuffel. This was the domination of immigrant Germans, exploiting the country as a foreign colony.

THE REGIME OF OFFICIALS

The period inaugurated by the violent reaction against the system of Manteuffel and the brutal repressions of 1887, lasted until 1901. During these years power was exclusively in the hands of the immigrant officials, who formed a close oligarchy, arrogant and meddlesome.

To this class of Germans, who had come into the country as conquerors, greedy for all the advantages of the situation, and who not only monopolised all

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administrative functions, but even attempted on various occasions to obtain places in Parliament from the electors, Alsace and the Alsatians had no rights at all. The annexed territories were Imperial lands, and as such were to be classed with colonies rather than with the confederated States united under the Imperial crown. In relation to the central power at Berlin, they should be merely a sort of a province, not a State with well-defined rights and powers, like Bavaria or Württemberg.

To justify this refusal of all rights to Alsace-Lorraine, the Germans insisted that had the country been united to Prussia it would have fared no better, and would have been in the position of a Prussian province. They also made capital of the fact that, prior to the annexation, the annexed country had enjoyed no autonomy under France, and had merely formed departments like the rest.

Such were the sophisms to which the Germans had recourse to justify their dictatorship and their exceptional laws, to keep Alsace-Lorraine in direct dependence upon Berlin and to refuse her any measure of independence and autonomy. But the conclusions they drew from these arguments did not only affect the political situation of the country : if Alsace-Lorraine, as territory of the Empire, had no rights, they, the Imperial officials, representing the central authority, were alone entitled to hold public office. This was their monopoly. Every Alsatian who solicited for a post was looked upon as an intruder, trying to snatch from some member of the ruling caste a right that was his due.

Thus the antagonism between the native Alsatians and the immigrant Germans was perpetuated and even intensified. At this juncture it was no longer

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possible to speak of the terrorisation of the annexed provinces by French opinion. It became necessary to find some other explanation of the fidelity of the Alsatians to the French idea. Those who would not rally to Germany were not *historisch denkend*!—they thought after the manner of persons who have had no historical education! This argument, reiterated for years by the German newspapers, implied a profound contempt; it emanated from the dogma of the superiority definitely acquired by Germany in the history of the world.

Those who did not acclaim the new Empire had not grasped the fact that the hand of history has consecrated Germany for all time, that the hegemony of Germany is assured and that no other nation will ever be able to undermine it, and, above all, that the country to which we proposed to remain faithful is old and decrepit, and doomed to inevitable decadence.

The Germans proposed to monopolise history. Their past—in the form taught by themselves—was to be the only one on record. At the word of command we were to forget over two centuries of our national life. The most vivid and glorious memories of our families and communes were to disappear. Subsequently, the immigrants showed to what depths of baseness they could descend by their actions against the guardians of military tombs, the *Souvenir français* and the *Souvenir alsacien-lorrain*.

These were conditions we could not accept: even had we believed in Germany's mission in the future, we could not have renounced our past without a loss of dignity and a failure in honour.

Our fidelity to our past necessarily led to conflicts. The German Empire—which has always

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been eager to celebrate its jubilees of twenty-five years, as if it had a presentiment that it would not celebrate those of fifty years—had commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the battles of Alsace in 1895. A French journalist who had been present at these rejoicings contrasted them in *Le Petit Journal* with an interview he reported with one of our deputies to the Reichstag, M. Jacques Preiss. It contained the following passage :

“ Not to speak of their rights, for which they claim respect, the Alsatian-Lorrains cannot believe that France has finally accepted the blows she has received—her defeat ; that she has forgotten what has been taken from her, and certain humiliations, among others the entry of the German troops into Paris ; if she were other than what we suppose, France would no longer be herself ; she would lose all her prestige in the world, and abandon her *rôle* in history.”

M. Preiss apparently did not accept the dogma of the historic mission definitely assigned to Germany ; he believed that France has still a part to play in the world. M. Preiss was not *historisch denkend*. In German eyes, the passage I have just quoted was a crime, a crime which led to M. Jacques Preiss' prosecution on a charge of high treason.

A few months later, Germany celebrated the centenary of her first Emperor. The Government of Alsace-Lorraine organised great festivities, and the official press insisted that the public schools, the municipalities and the societies should take part in them. In the face of this campaign the *Colmarer Zeitung* declared in a categorical article that the Alsatians had no part in these rejoicings. *Wir*

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machen nicht mit—we will not make merry with them.^o And as the Government had also prescribed religious ceremonies the writer, Abbé Sipp, had added : “ We will pray for the dead who fell in the wars made by William I, and we will also pray for this Emperor ; for we remember that before God, the Supreme Judge, the Emperor is judged as well as the beggar, and that we find in the Scriptures these awful words bearing on rulers and their fate : ‘ Mercy will soon pardon the meanest, but mighty men shall be mightily tormented.’ ”

M. Sipp not only failed to recognise the mission of Germany on earth, but he dared to speak of terrors of divine justice in connection with the Emperor whom all Germans venerate. The Germans perfectly understood the allusion to the falsification of the Ems telegram which William I had condoned, and by which he had profited.

The newspaper was suppressed by a dictatorial decree, and was only saved from prosecution by the intercession of the Grand Duchess of Baden, daughter of William I.

The two incidents cited suffice to illustrate the new form assumed by the opposition of the annexed territories. A new generation was arising in Alsace in the last years of the nineteenth century. It had never known France ; it had studied in Germany and served its term in the German Army. As they were obliged to live in a country which France had not been able to liberate, these young people might have been allowed more freedom in the choice of their country. They might have become reconciled to Germany without any rupture of personal ties.

But to win over this new generation, it should have been made possible for them to adopt Germany as

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their country. On the contrary, the *official régime*, anxious to uphold the privileges of the immigrants, seemed deliberately to do all it could to make adhesion to Germany impossible for them. To expect a people to blot out two centuries of its history, to ask sons to repudiate the past of their fathers, was to impose a loss of national dignity and an indifference to family tradition. Those who aspired to Germanise Alsace could not see that what they required was something base and vile, and that they would condemn all those who acquiesced to the contempt of Alsatians faithful to their past.

If the Germans had had any chivalry, they would have sought some means of allowing those who became German to retain their self-respect. They never understood this. Those Alsatians who went over to the Germans secretly put forward motives of material gain to excuse themselves to their compatriots. Germany could build no sure foundation on the adhesion of a few sordid and cowardly souls.

THE PIONEERS OF KULTUR

The ascendancy of the officials was brought to an end in 1901 by the personal intervention of William II. The Emperor disgraced von Puttkammer, the Secretary of State, who had been the leader of the party, and replaced him by M. von Koeller. Having received formal orders to inaugurate a system of conciliation, von Koeller conscientiously carried out his mission, little as it seemed to accord with his past and with his reputation for harshness.

By a few authoritative measures he curbed the officials, confining them strictly to the exercise of their functions. The dictatorship and the exceptional laws were abrogated. The new Government

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interfered as little as possible in public life, leaving it to the free play of parties. It thus succeeded in disarming political opposition.

If the national question had been a mere outcome of the political situation, it might have been supposed that Germanisation had now been achieved. Nothing could have been farther from the fact. On the contrary, in the place of the former political conflict, a new contest arose, more bitter, more violent, and more offensive than those which had preceded it, in that it affected questions and persons generally respected in political struggles.

Now that the Koeller *régime* no longer allowed the immigrant officials a preponderance in the direction of government, and they found themselves strictly confined to their professional tasks, while a place was made in the administration for the sons of the soil, they dreaded a restriction of their privileges. Their monopoly was attacked. As they did not dare to enter upon an overt campaign against the *régime*, they emphasised all the differences that separated them from the native population, and posed as the representatives of *Deutschtum* in contrast to the *Welschlinge*, of Germanism as opposed to the *Francillons*. They incarnated German *Kultur* in the sight of a population attached to French culture.

From this time forth, the German immigrants affected to look upon the native Alsatians as a reactionary and unenlightened mass. Persisting in their attachment to a vanished past, and faithful to a senile and decadent France, they had been unable to keep abreast of the progress represented in the world by the German Empire. Alsace lacked the moral maturity which would have entitled her to a place

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in the German fold ; she was *unreif*. The immigrants had therefore a civilising mission to accomplish among this inferior population : they announced themselves as *Kulturpioniers*, the Pioneers of *Kultur*.

Germany had taken possession of science at the outset, by creating a monopoly of teaching in favour of official methods and doctrines. She now claimed to inculcate her ideas of the Good and the Beautiful. We felt little admiration for the too numerous specimens of German art vouchsafed to us, in spite of the efforts made to cultivate our taste for these. The immigrants boasted of having introduced physical culture and love of sport among us. Their taste for excursions had led to the discovery of the Vosges, of which, it appeared, we had ignored the beauties if not the existence. But German pretensions went beyond all this : attached as we were to the shallow and superficial culture of France, we had no conception of duty, of the categoric imperative, of scruples of conscience and moral delicacy.

Our inferiority was caused by the defective education of our mothers. Brought up in French boarding-schools, the women of the Alsatian middle classes were even less accessible to German *Kultur* than the men. The early education of children, family life and social habits had accordingly remained French. The Germans wished to change our manner of life, and to this end they demanded that Alsatian girls should be prevented from going to school in France, and that they should be forced to submit to German education. The Germanisation which had failed as applied to the men was now to be essayed with the women and young girls. Our private life, our family circle, were to be submitted to the control of the Pioneers of *Kultur*.

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This new pretension was lacking alike in discretion and delicacy. It was an ignoble attempt to coerce the very personality of a people. The application of the principle by tactless persons could not fail to be insulting. I will give an instance.

At a Pan-German Congress held at Wiesbaden, a German clergyman, Pastor Spieser, gave an account of his campaign in favour of German *Kultur*. When visiting one of his colleagues, he had noticed that the latter talked French to his family. He tried by every means to persuade his friend to adopt the German language, but was met by the objection that the wife of his colleague insisted on speaking French. He then pointed out the weakness and cowardice of allowing oneself to be thus dominated by a woman. Finding his efforts unsuccessful, he sent his friend a book entitled *Ueber den biologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes* (On the Biological Imbecility of Woman). The Pan-German Congress heartily applauded this courageous manifestation of German *Kultur*.

The struggle took the most varied forms. On one occasion the German newspapers sought to bring William II himself into the field. They declared that during one of his visits to Urville he had said that the use of soap must be introduced into Lorraine!

The Germans did not foresee that in using such weapons they laid themselves open to counter-thrusts impossible to parry. It is dangerous to make arrogant claims to a superiority by no means indisputable. "Ready to wound," they forgot that they were ridiculous. Zisliu and Hausi reminded them of the fact by their caricatures.

The immigrants seemed unaware that arrogance and insult are not good instruments of political

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domination ; they had no idea to what a trenchant and popular attack they exposed themselves in provoking the sarcasms of our caricaturists. A new warfare was waged with unprecedented vehemence and asperity. Politicians had to follow the movement, and the immigrants on their side had recourse to the law. A long series of political prosecutions chastened those who had dared to laugh at *Kultur*.

The antagonism between culture and *Kultur* had greatly widened the chasm that divided the native population and the immigrant officials. On the eve of the war, the two groups seemed as irreconcilable as on the morrow of the annexation. The resulting political struggles, the debates on the new constitution, the affairs of Graffenstaden and Saverne had further embittered the situation. Herr von Jagow expressed the facts in a phrase : The Germans of Alsace-Lorraine were in an enemy's country in 1914.

All the methods directed to the Germanisation of the inhabitants had failed. The Alsatians had remained unmoved by the amiability of Manteuffel and the political concessions of Koeller. Given over to the tyranny of the immigrant officials, they had endured the terror of 1887 with *sang-froid*, and had refused with dignity to forget their past. For the Alsatians who rallied to the masters from base or interested motives the people had nothing but contempt ; for the Germans who offered them the blessings of *Kultur* they had nothing but ridicule.

Germany, having set herself an impossible task, had used means directly opposed to the attainment of her object. She could not succeed ; Germanisation was foredoomed to failure.

I have now explained to you in a few words why Alsace considered herself an integral part of France,

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in spite of the dialect spoken by the lower classes, and why she has retained her affection for her mother country throughout forty-four years of German domination. It might seem from what has been said that the question of Alsace-Lorraine was that of a dispute which only concerned France and Germany.

But it is by no means the case. The question of Alsace-Lorraine was the first manifestation of that madness which invaded Germany after her victories, and has grown steadily ever since. As such, it concerned all Europe. The Alsatian and Lorraine deputies of the Bordeaux Assembly recognised this, for in their declaration of February 17th, 1871, they inserted a passage addressed to Europe at large :

“Europe cannot permit or ratify the abandonment of Alsace and Lorraine. The civilised nations, as guardians of justice and national rights, cannot remain indifferent to the fate of their neighbours, under pain of becoming, in their turn, victims of the outrages they have tolerated. Modern Europe cannot allow a people to be seized like a herd of cattle ; she cannot continue deaf to the repeated protests of threatened nationalities, she owes it to her instinct of self-preservation to forbid such abuses of power. She knows, too, that the unity of France is now, as in the past, a guarantee of the general order of the world, a barrier against the spirit of conquest and invasion.

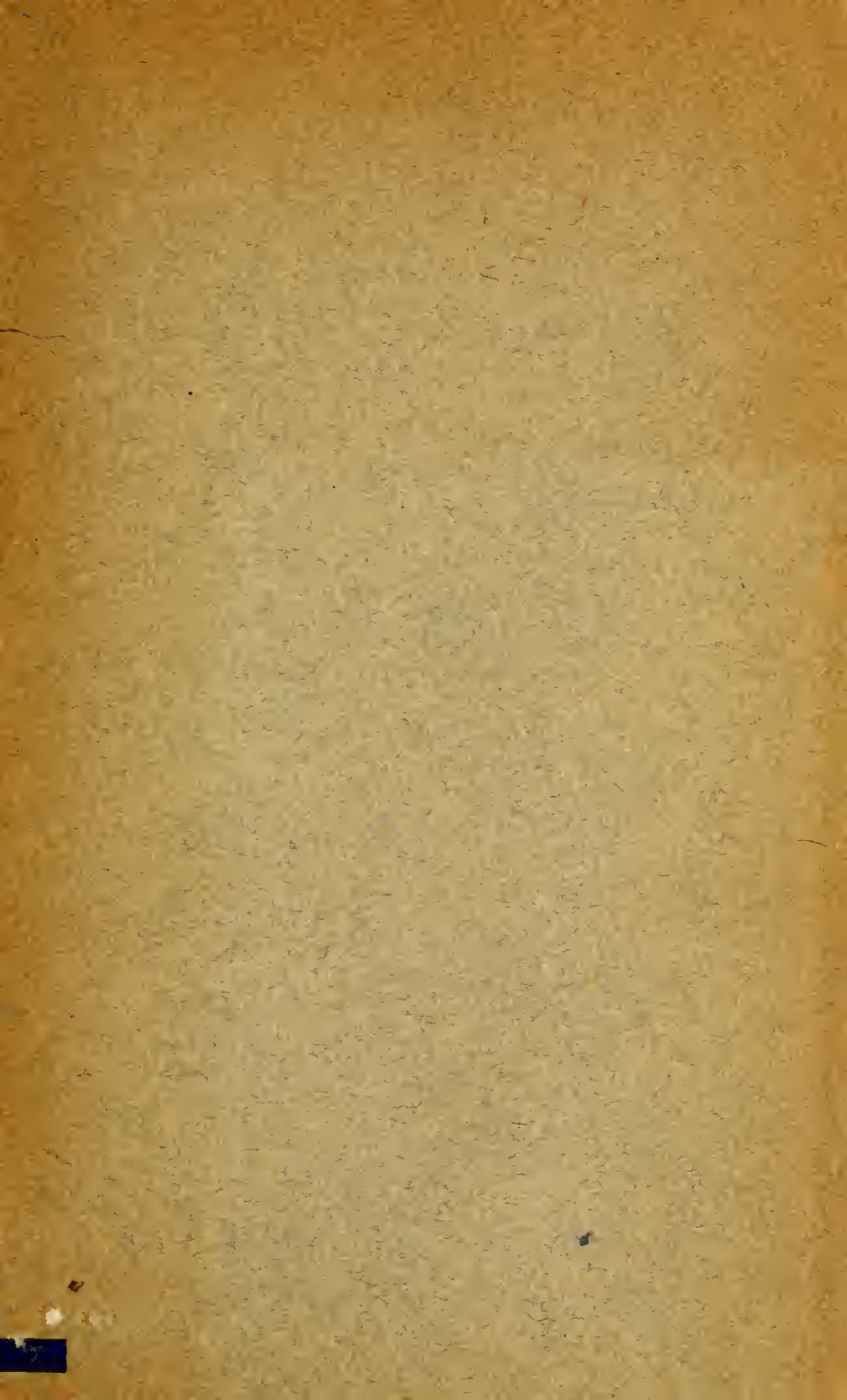
“Peace concluded at the price of a cession of territory could be nothing but a costly truce, and not a final peace. It would be for all a cause of internal unrest, a permanent and legitimate provocation to war.”

Europe was unmoved, but our deputies were

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right. Since the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, the world has been given over to militarism. Intoxicated by her lust for hegemony and world-domination, Germany threatened every other country, and when the moment seemed to her propitious, she let loose the terrors of war. But this time Europe understands, she has resisted the blow. Since the crime of the *Lusitania* even America is beginning to understand.

We await with confidence the re-establishment of justice in the world and our speedy return to our French fatherland.



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